

Race to the Top at a Glance

Evaluations of Teacher Effectiveness: State Requirements for Classroom Observations

In the past two years many States have made changes to their teacher evaluation systems to incorporate multiple measures of teacher effectiveness, including student performance information. Many of these changes include new requirements that teacher ratings inform a range of career development decisions, from how to support the professional growth of teachers to tenure and other career milestones.

This brief provides a snapshot of the rules governing classroom observations used in teacher evaluations in selected Race to the Top grantees.

The information was collected in response to a technical assistance request to the **Reform Support Network (RSN)** from Georgia, where education leaders charged with designing that State's teacher evaluation system were interested in learning more about the policies and guidelines that other States had established regarding classroom observations.

As part of this work, States are making changes or calling for local educational agencies (LEAs) to make changes to the rules for how evaluations are conducted—including setting requirements for who conducts evaluations, specifying the timing of teacher observations, identifying methods for collecting data on teachers' classroom practice, and laying out how to incorporate different types of evidence for rating teacher performance.

This brief explores emerging State policy on one specific aspect of teacher evaluation rules—the requirements for classroom observations. These rules often address:

- the number of times teachers must be observed each year;
- whether classroom observations will be announced or unannounced;
- requirements for feedback, such as pre- and post-observation conferences; and
- requirements for specific classroom observation instruments, such as rubrics, to be used for teacher evaluations.

In order to examine these issues, the RSN collected publicly accessible policy data from 11 Race to the Top grantees: Colorado, Delaware, the District of Columbia,¹ Florida, Louisiana, Illinois, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Rhode Island and Tennessee. The analysis presents the policy approaches to conducting teacher observations taken by these States. The analysis does not attempt to present a comprehensive or exhaustive overview of teacher evaluation policy, nor is it an effort to recommend or assess the quality of these policies. The information is intended to help States and LEAs charged with designing teacher evaluation systems to learn more about the policies and guidelines that other States have established regarding classroom observations.

¹ The analysis includes the "statewide" policies of the District of Columbia's Office of State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), not the rules of the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) evaluation system, IMPACT.

Although there is a wide range of policy approaches taken by States, the RSN's analysis found some common factors across these 11 States:

- **Multiple observations.** Each of the 11 States incorporates classroom observations into their teacher evaluation systems, and all require multiple observations of teacher practice as part of the annual evaluation of new/probationary teachers, with Tennessee requiring the most observations (six) of new teachers.
- **Varying frequency of observation by teacher experience and performance.** Most States examined differentiate the number of observations required for teacher evaluations based on a teacher's seniority and tenure status, requiring more frequent observations for new teachers than for veteran teachers. Some States, such as Illinois and Ohio, also vary the number of required observations according to teacher performance. Illinois, for example, requires that tenured teachers rated as "excellent" or "proficient" have two observations biannually. However, it subjects teachers rated as "unsatisfactory" or "needs improvement" to three observations each year. Ohio observes "accomplished" teachers every two years rather than annually.
- **Advance warning for classroom visits.** Teacher evaluation policies in almost half of the 11 States—Delaware, Tennessee, New York, Rhode Island and Louisiana—require that some observations of teachers in the classroom be unannounced; evaluators do not provide teachers with advance warning of classroom visits. Colorado, Florida, North Carolina, Ohio, the District of Columbia and Illinois do not specify rules for announced versus unannounced visits.
- **Examining student work.** Colorado, Illinois and Florida all specify that classroom observations include an examination of student work by the evaluator.
- **Feedback on observations.** Except for New York, which has stipulated a specific method, each of the States examined for this analysis specifies rules for how evaluators share feedback with teachers about the results of classroom observation. Delaware, Illinois, Tennessee, North Carolina and Rhode Island require conferences tied to classroom observations in order to provide feedback on the teacher evaluation process. Colorado, Louisiana, Ohio, the District of Columbia and Rhode Island specify that teachers receive observation feedback, most often in writing.
- **Other specifications about conducting observations of teacher practice.** State policies vary in how much additional detail they specify about teacher observation requirements. Some States, such as Delaware, North Carolina and Ohio, have set requirements for the expected length of observations (typically 30 minutes) or require that an observation occur over the course of an entire lesson. Some States specify the instruments to be used for observation, the designated official required to conduct observations or other details and procedures for the classroom observations.

How many teacher observations are required annually?		
State	New/Probationary Teachers	Non-Probationary or Tenured Teachers
Colorado	The State observes probationary teachers twice annually. Probationary teachers are defined by CO SB191 as those teachers who have not completed three consecutive years of demonstrated effectiveness.	The State observes non-probationary teachers at least once annually.
Delaware	The State requires two observations annually for novice teachers (those who have less than three years of experience or are enrolled in an alternative certification program).	The State requires one observation annually for experienced teachers.
District of Columbia	OSSE does not specify the number of observations; LEAs are required to show evidence of "multiple formal and/or informal observations."	OSSE does not specify the number of observations; LEAs are required to show evidence of "multiple formal and/or informal observations." The DCPS IMPACT evaluation system requires five formal annual observations: three by an administrator (principal or assistant principal) and two by an impartial, third-party observer called a master educator.
Florida	To be determined by LEAs; however the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Florida and Race to the Top LEAs includes the following minimum: Newly hired teachers must be observed and evaluated at least twice during the first year of teaching in their LEA.	To be determined by LEAs; however the LEA Race to the Top MOUs include the following guidelines and minimums: A performance evaluation, including observations, must be conducted at least annually for each non-probationary teacher.
Illinois	The State requires three observations biannually for non-tenured teachers.	The State requires two observations biannually for tenured teachers rated "excellent" or "proficient" and three observations for tenured teachers rated as "needs improvement" or "unsatisfactory."
Louisiana	The State observes instructional practice at least once annually during a formal, announced observation. It also performs at least one additional informal, unannounced observation of instructional practice.	The State requires a minimum of one formal, announced observation of instructional practice and at least one additional informal, unannounced observation of instructional practice annually.
New York	Principals or other trained administrators are required to provide at least two classroom observations annually.	At least two classroom observations by a principal or other trained administrator are required annually.
North Carolina	Principals formally observe probationary teachers (defined as tenure track employees who have not yet acquired tenure) at three times; peers formally observe them once.	Principals must conduct at least three observations, including one formal observation of career teachers annually during the year in which a career status teacher participates in a summative evaluation.
Ohio	The State requires two formal observations and periodic classroom walkthroughs annually for all teachers. Teachers rated "accomplished" may be observed every two years, rather than annually.	The State requires two formal observations and periodic classroom walkthroughs annually for all teachers. Teachers rated "accomplished" may be observed every two years, rather than annually.
Rhode Island	The State requires at least four observations, one of which must be announced and 30 minutes or more in length, annually.	The State requires at least four observations, one of which must be announced and 30 minutes or more in length, annually.
Tennessee	The State observes apprentice (non-tenured) teachers six times annually, three in each semester.	The State observes all teachers on professional licenses four times annually, with two observations occurring in each semester.

Are classroom observations required to be announced or unannounced?

Colorado	The State education agency does not specify rules for announced vs. unannounced observations.
Delaware	Delaware requires both announced and unannounced classroom observations. It subjects all teachers to announced visits and strongly recommends that the first observation be announced. Novice (or new) teachers as well as experienced teachers who have not earned a rating of "Highly Effective" or "Effective" on their most recent Summative Evaluation must receive a minimum of one unannounced visit.
District of Columbia	The State education agency does not specify rules for announced vs. unannounced observations.
Florida	Florida does not specify rules for announced vs. unannounced observations; the determination is to be made by the LEAs.
Illinois	The SEA does not yet specify rules for announced vs. unannounced observations as the state is still developing their rules and requirements.
Louisiana	Louisiana requires both announced and unannounced observations. One formal, announced observation and at least one informal, unannounced observation of instructional practice are required.
New York	At least one observation must be unannounced.
North Carolina	The SEA does not specify rules for announced vs. unannounced observations.
Ohio	The SEA does not specify rules for announced vs. unannounced observations.
Rhode Island	The State requires that each teacher receive one announced observation of at least 30 minutes and at least three, preferably four to six, unannounced observations of at least 15 minutes each.
Tennessee	At least half of all observations must be unannounced.

Does the State require pre- and post-observation conferences or other feedback on classroom observations?

Colorado	The SEA agency does not specify rules for pre- and post-observation conferences, but evaluators must provide written feedback following the observation.
Delaware	The State requires pre-observation conferences for announced observations and post-observation conferences for all observations.
District of Columbia	The OSSE does not specify rules for pre- and post-observation conferences, but LEAs must show "evidence of timely and constructive feedback" in the form of documentation of the observation and a post-observation feedback process, or another process for providing written or verbal feedback.
Florida	Florida does not specify rules for pre- and post-observation conferences; LEAs must make the determination.
Illinois	The State requires pre-observation conferences for announced observations and post-observation conferences for all observations.
Louisiana	The SEA does not specify rules for pre- and post-observation conferences, but evaluators must provide written feedback following the observation.
New York	The SEA does not specify rules for pre- and post-observation conferences.
North Carolina	The principal must conduct a post-observation conference no later than 10 school days after each formal observation.
Ohio	The SEA does not specify rules for pre- and post-observation conferences, but evaluators must provide written feedback following the observation.
Rhode Island	Rhode Island requires written feedback and a post-observation conferences for 30-minute announced observations; informal post-observation feedback is required for short, unannounced observations.
Tennessee	All announced observations include a pre-conference, while unannounced observations do not. Any observation that includes the instruction domain requires a formal post-conference. Observations that are 15 minutes require only an informal post-conference. Teachers should receive observation feedback within one week or five school days.

State	Are any observation instruments mandated or recommended by the State?	What is/are the observation instrument(s)?
Colorado	The State has not selected an instrument for recommendation yet.	Not specified
Delaware	The State recommends a single instrument but allows local selection/modification through a waiver process that involves State review of the proposed instruments.	Modified Danielson's Framework for Teaching
District of Columbia	OSSE does not mandate a specific instrument. However, DCPS does mandate a single instrument.	For DCPS, IMPACT—Teaching and Learning Framework
Florida	There is a State-approved model.	Marzano Teacher Evaluation Framework
Illinois ²	Districts have two options: develop their own systems that meet minimum standards mandated by State rules; or choose to use all or portions of the State-designed optional model, including the observation instrument.	Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Professional Practice
Louisiana	Recent legislative reforms (Act 54) require observations as part of the comprehensive educator evaluation system but do not mandate a particular observation instrument. The State has developed model observation tools as part of the system.	The COMPASS Observation Instrument
New York	The New York Education Department requires selection from its approved list; LEAs may apply for a variance, however, to have a different rubric approved.	The New York Education Department includes the following instruments for selection: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Danielson's Framework for Teaching • Danielson's Framework for Teaching, 2011 revised edition • Marzano's Causal Teacher Evaluation Model • New York State Teacher Certification • Examinations Framework for the Observation of Effective Teaching • New York State United Teachers Teacher • Practice Rubric [NY10]
North Carolina	The State requires the observation rubric for classroom teachers.	State developed instrument in partnership with McREL
Ohio	Ohio mandates single instrument, but final decisions have not yet been made.	State developed instrument
Rhode Island	The State recommends a single instrument, but LEAs have the option of designing alternative evaluation systems that are approved by the State and meet the Educator Evaluation Standards.	State developed Rhode Island Model
Tennessee	The State recommends a single instrument but allows LEAs to select alternative systems that meet State guidelines.	TAP: The System for Teacher and Student Advancement

² Illinois Department of Education. Performance Evaluation Advisory Council. <http://www.isbe.state.il.us/PEAC/html/faqs.htm>. Accessed: March 8, 2012.

What other State requirements are specified regarding observations?

Colorado	Evaluators gauge teacher performance against the State's quality standards, five of which focus on professional practice, one of which focuses on student achievement. The standards include content knowledge; ability to establish a safe, inclusive and respectful learning environment; instruction planning and delivery; reflection on individual practice; leadership; and student academic growth. (Note that other sources of information besides observation can inform a teacher's rating on these components, including student perception measures, peer feedback, parent feedback, or review of teacher lesson plans or student work samples.)
Delaware	Observers evaluate teachers on four components: planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction and professional responsibilities. Delaware strongly recommends that the length of the first observation be sufficient to observe a lesson from beginning to end and subsequent observations be at least 30 minutes long.
District of Columbia	The OSSE does not specify rules for observations.
Florida	Observations are to be part of an evaluation that also includes reviews of student work. Each LEA may also establish a peer assistance process.
Illinois	When observing teachers, evaluators will emphasize research-based practices that promote student learning, evidence such as lesson plans and student work to support various ratings, and cultural and developmental issues that can affect teaching.
Louisiana	Teachers will be observed on four competencies: planning, instruction, environment and professionalism. At least one teacher observation must occur during a complete lesson.
New York	Observations may be conducted in-person or by way of video. Observations must provide feedback on the teacher's performance against the New York State Teaching Standards; LEAs may select from a menu of State-approved rubrics to assess performance based on these standards.
North Carolina	A formal observation must last at least 45 minutes or an entire class period. The principal and peer (in the case of a probationary teacher) shall note the teacher's performance in relationship to the applicable standards on the Rubric for Evaluating North Carolina Teachers. The standards of the rubric include: leadership, establishing a respectful environment for a diverse population of students, content knowledge, facilitating learning for students and reflecting on practice.
Ohio	Observations must be at least 30 minutes in duration.
Rhode Island	Using Rhode Island's Sample Observation Feedback Form, observers are expected to evaluate teachers in the following domains: planning and preparation, classroom instruction, classroom environment, assessment, reflection and professional responsibilities.
Tennessee	Principals, assistance principals or other instructional leaders trained in the observation protocol and using the TAP rubric will observe all educators. Observations will focus on: instruction, planning, environment and professionalism.

As one of a set of multiple measures States and LEAs are using to evaluate the effectiveness of teachers, classroom observations represent a powerful opportunity to focus on instruction and engage evaluators and teachers in a process of feedback and learning that can inform teacher practice, shape teacher preparation professional development and policy—and ultimately, help ensure an effective teacher in every classroom.

Sources/Links to More Information on State Requirements for Teacher Evaluation Systems

Colorado	http://www.cde.state.co.us/EducatorEffectiveness/EvaluationAndSupport.asp
Delaware	http://www.doe.k12.de.us/csa/dpasii/default.shtml
District of Columbia	https://sites.google.com/a/dc.gov/osse_race-to-the-top/home/teacher-and-leader-evaluations/TeacherPrincipalEvaluationRubric.pdf?attredirects=0&d=1
Florida	http://www.fldoe.org/arra/TeacherEvaluationSystems.asp
Illinois	http://www.isbe.state.il.us/PERA/default.htm
Louisiana	http://www.doe.state.la.us/compass/
New York	http://usny.nysed.gov/rttt/teachers-leaders/
North Carolina	http://sbepolicy.dpi.state.nc.us/policies/TCP-C-004.asp?pri=02&cat=C&pol=004&acr=TCP
Ohio	http://education.ohio.gov/GD/Templates/Pages/ODE/ODEDedicatedPage.aspx?page=970
Rhode Island	http://www.ride.ri.gov/educatorquality/educatorevaluation/
Tennessee	http://team-tn.org/how-team-works

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